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Information Renaissance

Department of Physics and Astronomy

University of Pittsburgh

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Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania 15260

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May 28, 1996

Mr. William Caton
Acting Secretary
Federal Communications Commission
1919 M Street N.W.
Washington, DC 20554

Dear Mr. Caton:

The enclosed material (six copies of which are provided here) was presented at an *ex parte* meeting with FCC staff and members of Federal-State Joint Board on Universal Service on May 15, 1996. The material is taken from an online access site that has been established to facilitate public involvement in the FCC's rulemaking process on Universal Service. The Internet address for this site is

<http://www.ckp.edu/info-ren/fcc/telecom.html>

Topics covered at the May 15 meeting included the structure of the online access site, the need for public involvement as described in a request from Information Renaissance (dated April 29, 1996) for an extension of the reply comment period, and the substance of the comments and reply comments that Information Renaissance has previously submitted in the matter of the Federal-State Joint Board on Universal Service, CC Docket No. 96-45. We appreciate your consideration of this material.

Sincerely,

Robert D. Carlitz
Executive Director
Information Renaissance

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This site presents information on the Telecommunications Act of 1996 with an emphasis on how the Act can assist schools in developing Internet access and other telecommunications services. For related information see:

- Online announcement of this site.
- Press release describing this site.
- Federal Communications Commission.
- Benton Foundation.

Telecommunications Act of 1996

Brief Description

This year Congress enacted sweeping new legislation which redefines the landscape for telecommunications in the United States. There are two major features in this legislation:

- **Competition.** The Act attempts to establish an environment in which competition among various telecommunications providers is maximized.
- **Universal Service.** Previous telecommunications legislation (dating back to 1934) defined a concept of Universal Service, which provided subsidies to enable rural telephone customers to be supplied with basic telephone service. The new Act extends this concept to include the following areas:
 - Basic telephone service. This is a continuation of prior coverage, although the possibility exists to extend this coverage to include more features than were previously regarded as "basic".
 - Schools, libraries and rural health care providers. There is a stipulation that these groups should receive subsidized access to telecommunications services, with specific mention of access from every school classroom.
 - Advanced services for schools, libraries and rural health care providers. These groups are to be provided with advanced services under a mechanism which allows the level of service to

evolve as telecommunications technology evolves.

The previous paragraphs are an effort to summarize and simplify the long and complex content of the new Telecommunications Act, particularly as it applies to K-12 education. It is important to note that the Act itself does not define many of the key terms that will have to be defined as the Act is implemented. It is the job of the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) to develop these definitions, and there is a process in place under which the public can participate in the implementation process. The full text of the Telecom Act is available online. Material relating to the Act is available from the FCC and the Benton Foundation.

Public Input

The way in which the FCC works is to issue a Notice of Proposed Rule Making on a given topic. There follows a comment period during which interested parties may file their comments with the Commission. These comments are placed on public display, and there is a further opportunity for interested parties to file reply comments on the topic in question.

In the matter of Universal Service a Federal-State Joint Board has been established to work out details of implementation of the Telecom Act. A Notice of Proposed Rule Making has been published, and the initial round of comments has taken place. We are now in the period during which reply comments may be filed, with an original deadline of May 7, 1996. (This deadline has been extended, as described below.) A text version of the Notice of Proposed Rule Making is available online, as is a formatted Word Perfect version and a Hypertext (HTML) version.

Extension of Deadline for Reply Comments

On April 30 *Information Renaissance* filed a request with the FCC for a one week extension of the deadline for reply comments on CC Docket No. 96-45 (the docket for the discussion of Universal Service and the creation of a Federal-State Joint Board to implement the Universal Service provisions of the Telecom Act). On Monday, May 6, we received word that the extension request has been denied. The reason for denying the request was that school and library subsidies are but one part of the larger issue of Universal Service, and the FCC did not want to slow down their implementation of the larger program in deference to issues relating solely to school and library concerns.

Although the request was denied, the fact that the denial was not issued until May 6 means that respondents will have until May 8 to get their reply comments filed with the FCC. We will try to complete the scanning of as many of the original comments as possible in advance of this deadline to make it easier for people outside of Washington to participate in this process.

Viewing the Comments

- Address your reply comments to:

Mr. William F. Caton
Acting Secretary
Federal Communications Commission
1919 M Street NW
Washington, DC 20554

You should send a signed and dated original with six copies to Mr. Caton.

- Send a single copy of your reply comments to:

International Transcription Service
Room 640 1990 M Street NW
Washington, DC 20036

- Send a diskette in Word Perfect for Windows format (version 5.1) to:

Ms. Ernestine Creech
Common Carrier Bureau
Accounting and Audits Division
2000 L Street NW
Washington, DC 20554

- Send individual copies of your reply comments to members of the Federal-State Joint Board. A complete list of their names and addresses is provided here. To make this task a little easier we are also providing a formatted Microsoft Word file which will print these addresses onto 1-1/3 x 4 inch mailing labels (*e.g.* Avery stock no. 5262). These copies should be postmarked in advance of the deadline cited above.
- Acknowledge your use of this online resource if it was helpful for the preparation of your comments. If there is enough interest in this resource, it will be maintained throughout the entire rule making process.

Some Issues to Consider

Here are some points that might be addressed in reply comments that you send to the FCC:

- Procedures and public involvement in the rule making process.
- Discounts versus mandated services.
- Basic versus advanced services.
- Scope of intended telecommunications use.

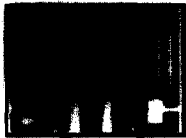
- Timetable for implementation.
- Magnitude of the subsidy required for schools, libraries and rural health care providers.
- Evolution of the technology deployed for schools, libraries and rural health care providers.

The *Information Renaissance* perspective on these issues is given on a separate page.

Acknowledgments



This Web site is maintained as part of ***Common Knowledge: Pittsburgh***, a National Science Foundation sponsored testbed for school networking in the Pittsburgh Public Schools. For a complete description of this project, you may refer to the project's Home Page.



Scanning and Optical Character Recognition of the FCC documents on this site have been supplied through the efforts of the American Micrographics Company. We are grateful to Randy Harper and his staff for their dedicated work on this project.



Information Renaissance is a non-profit organization established to promote the development of computer-based networks in support of education, community development and economic revitalization. The present project is one of several that this organization is undertaking to further these goals.

If you would like to make comments on the process described in these Web pages or point out errors in some of the scanned material, please send e-mail to telecom@hamlet.phyast.pitt.edu.
